

# GCSEs – the key facts



This section will help with:

- knowing how things have changed at GCSE
- supporting your child to make their GCSE options at the end of Key Stage 3
- explaining why GCSEs are so important in achieving success in adulthood
- knowing how our child's performance is measured at the end of Year 11

## GCSEs

### Why do GCSEs matter?

A Post 16 pathway might seem a long way off when your child is deciding on their GCSEs but their GCSE choices and grades can directly impact their later options at sixth form or college – and ultimately, their university or employment choices.

Most universities look for at least Cs in GCSE English, maths and perhaps science – which means a grade 5 or 4 is likely to be required in future applications. Some university courses go further and list specific subjects and grades they expect your child to have – so make sure they check directly with universities to find out their requirements.

If your child has got an idea of the degree subject they want to study, get them to take a look at the entry requirements for specific courses at universities and work back from there (i.e. 'This university course requires these A-levels; and to get on to this A-level course, I need these GCSEs...').

If they're not sure about what they want to study at university just yet, then having a good mix of subjects – including both the traditional academic subjects featuring in the English Baccalaureate model and creative subjects they're interested in – will help keep their options open.

Due to the changes to A-levels, GCSE grades are likely to play a more important role in university admissions. Because AS-levels will no longer count towards their final A-level grade (though they can contribute to UCAS points), admissions staff are more likely to look further afield when considering a young person's application; this may well include your child's GCSE grades.



## The Current Landscape at GCSE

There have been some significant changes to GCSEs, assessments and the way that both schools and pupils are measured in terms of performance and progress. Schools no longer are judged on the number of A\* - C grades in English and mathematics achieved by pupils. Instead, the performance of each school and pupil is based on how much progress they have made between the end of Year 6 (the end of Key Stage 2) and the end of Year 11 (the end of Key Stage 4).

The changes to the GCSE assessments and performance measures are explained below.

## What the new GCSEs look like

The main features of the new GCSEs are:

- A new grading scale of 9 to 1 will be used, with 9 being the top grade. This allows greater differentiation between students and helps distinguish the new GCSEs from previous versions.
- Assessment is mainly by exam, with other types of assessment used only where they are needed to test essential skills.
- There is new, more demanding content, which has been developed by government and the exam boards.
- Courses are designed for two years of study – they are no longer divided into different modules and students take all their exams in one period at the end of their course.
- Exams are only split into 'foundation tier' and 'higher tier' if one exam paper does not give all students the opportunity to show their knowledge and abilities.
- Resit opportunities are only available each November in English language and maths.
- Coursework and controlled assessment have disappeared from most subjects, apart from practical ones such as art, dance and drama.

## The new GCSE grading system

<p><b>9 is higher than a current A*</b>  <b>8 is between and A* and A.</b>  <b>7 is equal to an A</b>  <b>6 is equivalent to a high B</b>  <b>5 is between a B and C (strong pass)</b>  <b>4 is equal to a grade C (standard pass)</b>  <b>3 is in between a D and E</b>  <b>2 is between an E and F</b>  <b>1 is a G</b>  <b>U refers to an ungraded paper</b></p>	<b>New GCSE grades explained</b>	
	<b>9</b>	<b>A*</b>
	<b>8</b>	<b>A</b>
	<b>7</b>	<b>A</b>
	<b>6</b>	<b>B</b>
	<b>5 (strong pass)</b>	<b>B</b>
	<b>4 (standard pass)</b>	<b>C</b>
	<b>3</b>	<b>D</b>
	<b>2</b>	<b>E</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>U</b>	<b>G</b>	
<b>U</b>	<b>U</b>	

League tables report the percentage of students who achieve a 'strong pass' (5 or above) in both English (either language or literature) and maths.

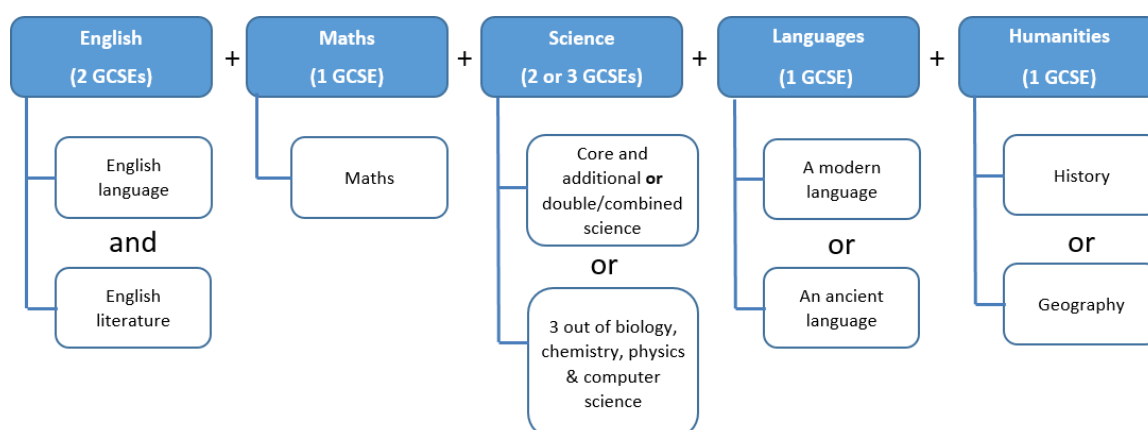
The number achieving a 'standard pass' (4 or above) is also reported. Grade 4 will remain the level that students must achieve without needing to re-sit English and Maths post-16.

## The EBacc

The English Baccalaureate, or EBacc, is a measure of how many pupils achieve a **good GCSE pass in six core academic subjects: English, maths, history or geography, combined science (which counts as two passes) and a language.** In addition, students must take both English language and literature, although they only need a grade A\*-C (old GCSEs) or 5+ (new GCSEs) in one of them.

From 2018, league tables will report on the average point score across the six EBacc subjects for all students, rather than reporting how many passed.

The following diagram illustrates what the EBacc looks like:



If your child's programme of study at GCSE contains the required subjects, they will qualify for the EBacc qualification. This will demonstrate that they have studied a broad range of subjects, and this can be beneficial for future university and job applications. There is no separate grade or certificate for the EBacc when your child receives their exam results.

Their performance in the EBacc subjects will also contribute to the school's and their own figure in the new performance measures, Attainment 8 and Progress 8.

An explanation of what these are and how they are calculated follows.

## **Attainment 8 and Progress 8**

Progress 8 and Attainment 8 are based on **pupils' performance in eight qualifications**. These are English and maths, up to three subjects from the EBacc list, and students' three highest scores from a range of other qualifications, including GCSEs and approved non-GCSEs. English and maths are given double weighting to reflect their importance.

Progress 8 is a new measure of the progress children make between the end of primary school and the end of secondary school. **It's designed to encourage good quality teaching across a broad curriculum.**

If a school's score is 0, then all pupils on average have made the progress that is expected of them by the end of Key Stage 4.

### **What's the significance of Attainment 8 and Progress 8 for your child and you?**

There are several implications of these new measures:

- It is strongly recommended each pupil studies at least 8 subjects at GCSE as it provides them with a broad experience and widens out their choice of Post 16 and Post 18 options. When making their choices at GCSE (see the next section) you can provide further guidance to your foster child about a suitable programme which will give them a comprehensive experience of knowledge and skills.
- If you have a foster child who is in Year 5 or 6 and will soon be involved in making an application to high school, you can ask each school being considered what their current Attainment 8 and Progress 8 scores are the whole cohort and also for children in care (if there were any on roll in the previous year's Year 11 cohort).

## **Frequently Asked Questions about Attainment 8 and Progress 8?**

### ***Will I find out my child's progress 8 score?***

Schools are not required to share pupils' progress 8 scores. The school may choose to report it.

### ***Can my child take more than three EBacc subjects?***

Yes. Pupils can take any subjects in the DfE's list of approved qualifications as part of the 'open group' of qualifications. The open group of qualifications is where the other subjects taken as options by a pupil are placed, as well as any other of the core subjects that haven't been counted in the core group. Option subjects must be on a list of approved courses to count in the open group towards a pupil's Attainment 8 and Progress 8 scores.

### ***Do all pupils have to study the progress 8 set of subjects?***

Not necessarily. Progress 8 scores will be calculated for all pupils, except those who did not sit tests at the end of year 6. However, a school can enter any pupil for any qualification, including those not in the EBacc.

(Source: [https://wernethschool.com/key\\_information/downloads/Parent\\_Pamphlet\\_-\\_Progress\\_8.pdf](https://wernethschool.com/key_information/downloads/Parent_Pamphlet_-_Progress_8.pdf))

## Supporting your child to make their GCSE subject choices

Choosing the right subjects to study at GCSE is key to success at GCSE. Depending upon the school that your child attends, they will make their GCSE choices either in Year 8 or Year 9. This means that they will have either a two or three Key Stage 4.

There are several factors that a child needs to consider when making each subject choice:

- Is this a subject that I enjoy? Can I see myself enjoying the subject for two/three years?
- Am I likely to do well in this subject?
- Do I need to take this subject for the career path, Post 16 or Post 18 course that I would like to take?
- Does the subject's content and style play to my strengths?
- What grades have pupils who have a similar ability to me in previous years achieved in this subject?

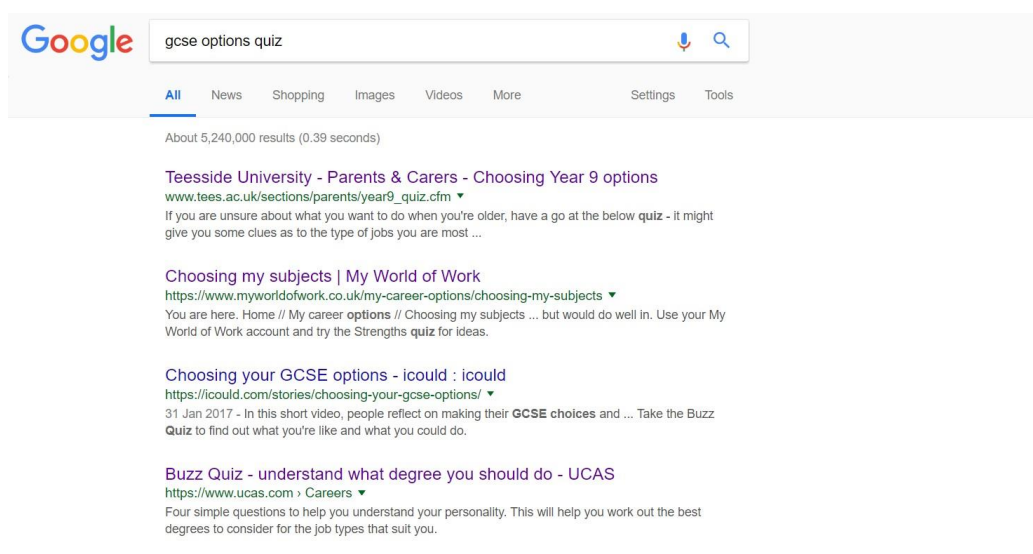
Online quizzes such as the example below may be helpful for your child to complete to enable them to make informed decisions about their choice of GCSE subjects.

Answering these questions will help when you're making your decision. You can use them to put together a shortlist of subjects.

<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>How do you like to learn?</b></p>	<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>Where could they take you?</b></p>	<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>What subjects do you enjoy?</b></p>	<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>What subjects are you good at?</b></p>	<p><b>5</b></p> <p><b>What do others think you're good at?</b></p>
<p>Do you like English and drama because you get to talk and listen? Or woodwork because you are good with your hands? Working out how you like to learn can help you choose your subjects.</p>	<p>Know what you want to do when you leave school? Picking the right subjects could help you get there, or keep your options open if you haven't decided yet.</p>	<p>You're more likely to get better marks in subjects that you find interesting. Does time fly by in some subjects and go at a snail's pace in others?</p>	<p>What do you get your best marks in? There may be some you've never studied before but would do well in. Use your <a href="#">My World of Work account</a> and try the <a href="#">Strengths quiz</a> for ideas.</p>	<p>Talk to your parents, friends, family, teachers and careers adviser. What do they think would suit you and why? Ask for their opinions, and see how they weigh up with your own thoughts.</p>

(Source: <https://www.myworldofwork.co.uk/my-career-options/choosing-my-subjects>)

## Helping your child to maximise their outcomes at secondary school



The screenshot shows a Google search for 'gcse options quiz'. The search bar contains the text 'gcse options quiz'. Below the search bar, there are navigation tabs for 'All', 'News', 'Shopping', 'Images', 'Videos', 'More', 'Settings', and 'Tools'. The search results show 'About 5,240,000 results (0.39 seconds)'. The first result is from Teesside University, titled 'Teesside University - Parents & Carers - Choosing Year 9 options'. The second result is from My World of Work, titled 'Choosing my subjects | My World of Work'. The third result is from iCould, titled 'Choosing your GCSE options - iCould : iCould'. The fourth result is from UCAS, titled 'Buzz Quiz - understand what degree you should do - UCAS'.

### Support in school

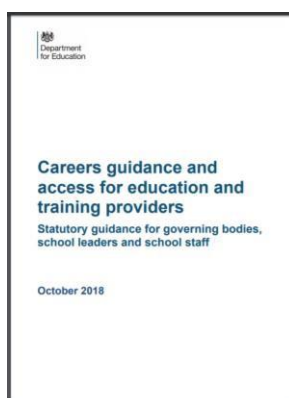
Your child's school should provide a range of ways in which to support their choosing of their GCSE options. It will depend upon each school, but there may be:

- Information giving assemblies to pupils about the option process and subjects available
- An information evening for pupils and their parent/carer to attend to find out more about the option process and the subjects available
- An options interview – with their form tutor or a member of the senior leadership team to discuss and agree appropriate options

In addition, updated DfE careers and education guidance for school says that children in care should be given 'strong support' in this area. Each school must appoint a Careers Leader who coordinates this support. The Careers Leader or a nominated colleague should meet with your child on a regular basis and may play a part in PEP meetings or CiC review meetings as and when advice, guidance and actions are required to support your child when making decisions about their education or careers choices.

The DfE guidance can be access through the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-provision-for-young-people-in-schools>



## Compulsory and Optional GCSE Subjects

Some subjects are compulsory at GCSE level and have to be taken by all young people. The compulsory subjects are:

**English** (English Literature and English Language or a single English GCSE)

**Maths**

**Science** (Combined Science or Individual Sciences)

Some schools make other subjects compulsory, so it is worth checking what you are required to do at your school.

Whatever the child is planning to do in the future, **it is now a requirement for them to retake both maths and English GCSEs until you obtain a Grade 4 in the new GCSE grading system.**

## GCSEs - Optional choices

Optional subjects vary from school to school, but you must be offered at least one course in each of four groups of subjects...

- Arts
- Design and Technology
- Humanities
- Modern Foreign Languages

Your child doesn't always have to choose one subject from each area but remember that studying a range of subjects at this stage is useful so that they have a wider range of options for later study and career choices.

Different schools offer a different range of GCSE subjects from which pupils can choose. Your child's school will be able to tell you what GCSE subjects and combinations are available.